

This is the Way the Baby Rides

Using a Car Seat for Your New Baby

**Child
Safety
Facts**
2005

Car Seat Safety for Babies

- Your baby should ride in a rear-facing car seat (child safety seat) up to at least age 1. This is the safest position. It protects babies from head and spinal cord injury.
- Follow car seat instructions and vehicle owner's manual to install and use the seat correctly.
- Buckle and tighten the harness snugly over your baby's shoulders.
- Put your baby in the back seat. The back seat is much safer than the front seat.
- **If your car has a passenger air bag**, never put your baby in the front seat unless the air bag has been turned off (see next column).
- Make the seat belt tight around the car seat.

Before your baby is born

Go to a car seat safety class if your hospital, health plan, or clinic gives one. Car seats can be hard to use correctly without help!

Pick out a car seat that fits in your vehicle and is easy to use. (See types, page 2.) Try it in your car before buying it.

Find out if your vehicle has a passenger air bag. Look in the owner's manual and on the visor for a warning label.

Practice installing the seat and adjusting the straps before your baby's birth. If you have trouble, you will have time to get help before your baby arrives. A trained child passenger safety technician (see Resources, page 2) can help.

Take with you to the hospital:

- baby clothes with legs
- car seat, instructions, and locking clip (if needed for installing the seat)
- two small receiving blankets, a washcloth and two old towels for padding

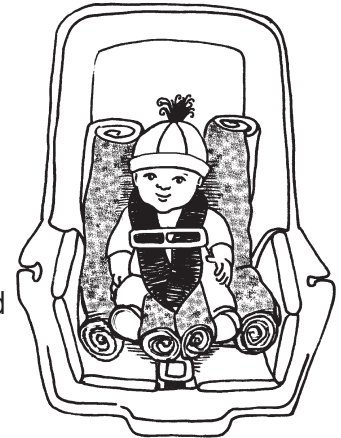
Bringing your new baby home

Dress your baby in clothes with legs so the crotch strap can go between her legs.

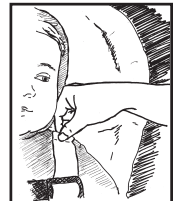
Put the harness straps in the lowest slots. Straps should be in slots closest to or just below your baby's shoulders.

Pad the sides of the car seat so your new baby sits comfortably with head back. Tuck rolled blankets or towels along the sides (**A**). If baby slides down, add a rolled washcloth between her crotch and the crotch strap. Avoid using a head support pad that you buy separately. It could make the straps too loose or push the head forward. A pad that comes with the seat is usually okay.

Adjust the harness to fit snugly, so you cannot pinch any slack at the shoulder (B**).** Avoid using thick blankets or heavy clothes under the straps. These make it impossible to get the harness tight enough to hold the baby in a crash. Buckle the harness first and then put a blanket over it.



A. *Padding the sides of the car seat keeps a newborn baby snug and comfortable.*



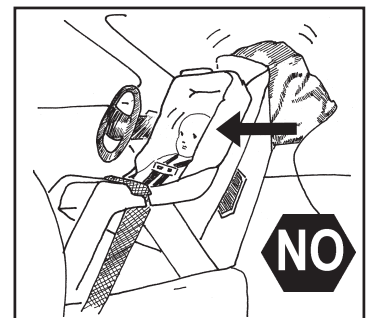
B. *Pinching strap*

Air bag danger: Put baby in back!

A baby riding in front with an air bag (**C**) is in great danger in even a minor crash. The air bag can open with great force, faster than the blink of an eye.

If you have a small truck or sports car, do not carry your baby in front unless its air bag has been shut off. Most very small vehicles have on/off switches for the passenger air bag.

The back seat is also safer for older children. Always make sure everyone in the vehicle is buckled up!



C. *An infant can be killed by the impact of an expanding air bag.*

*Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride*



Choosing a car seat for a new baby

The “best seat” is one that fits your baby and fits in your vehicle. A seat given to you as a gift may not be the best for your baby.

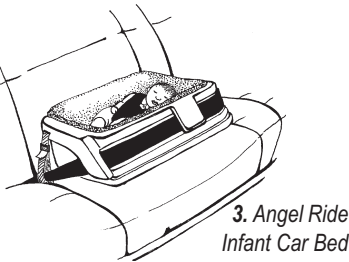
Make sure that the car seat is easy to buckle in tightly and the harness is easy to adjust, so you will use it correctly on every ride. Try to install it in every position where you might use it. Exchange it if it doesn't fit.



1. Infant-only car seat used only rear-facing.



2. Convertible seat with five-point harness used rear-facing.



3. Angel Ride Infant Car Bed

Two are available: Angel Ride Infant Car Bed® (Mercury Distributing, 800-815-6330) and Dream Ride® (Dorel, 800-544-1108).

Second-hand car seats

A second-hand car seat may have hidden safety problems. Use one only if you know for sure it has not been in a crash, all recalls (if any) have been repaired, and it has all its parts and the instructions. Avoid using a car seat that is more than 10 years old. Some have expiration dates, when the manufacturer advises to stop using them, on their shells.

Installing a car seat securely

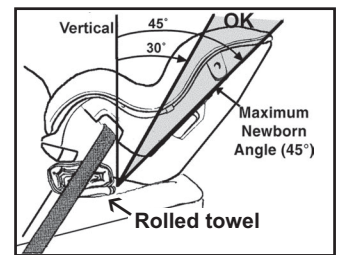
Place the car seat in the back seat, facing the rear.

The back seat is usually safer than the front, especially in a vehicle with air bags.

Attach the seat belt tightly. Different types of belts are tightened in different ways. Check the vehicle owner's manual and labels on seat belts. Make sure the car seat stays in place when you pull it forward or from side to side at the base. It is okay for a rear-facing car seat to tip toward the back of the vehicle.

New car seats have LATCH attachments to anchor them to the vehicle. These may be used instead of the seat belt if you have a new vehicle with LATCH anchors (check vehicle owner's manual and car seat instructions).

Make sure your baby reclines far enough so his head doesn't flop forward. If the vehicle seat slopes, adjust the base or put a tightly rolled towel or firm foam roll under the base of the car seat (D) if instructions allow. Don't tilt it more than halfway back.



D. Recline a car seat slightly using a rolled towel or firm foam roll.

If your new baby is very small

For a premie or low birth weight baby, choose a car seat without a padded shield. Find one with a small harness (shoulder strap slots less than 8 inches above the seat). Your baby may need a car bed if he or she has breathing or heart-rate problems when sitting up.

As your baby grows bigger

Keep harness straps in the lowest slots until your baby's shoulders reach the higher slots. If he uses an infant-only seat, move him into a convertible seat when his head is 1 inch from the top of the plastic shell.

Use a convertible seat facing the rear until he reaches at least 1 year of age. Even over age 1, riding facing the rear protects a baby's spine. Keep him rear-facing to at least 12 months from the original due date.

Car seats are not cribs. Use a car seat for a baby in the house only for short periods. Babies need to lie flat on their backs to sleep and be on their tummies to play.

Resources

- National Auto Safety Hotline, 888-DASH-2-DOT, www.nhtsa.gov
- SafetyBeltSafe Helpline, 800-745-SAFE (7233), www.carseat.org
- To find a local car seat inspection station: www.seatcheck.org, 866-SEATCHECK (866-732-8243)